DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 979 EC 303 927

AUTHOR Fritz, Marie F.; Miller, Maury
TITLE Teacher Perceptions: Impacts of Planning for Inclusion.
PUB DATE 6 Apr 95
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (73rd, Indianapolis, IN, April 5-9, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Demonstration Programs; *Disabilities; Elementary Education; Elementary School Teachers; *Inclusive Schools; Mainstreaming; Social Integration; Staff Development; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Background
IDENTIFIERS Indiana

ABSTRACT

This study attempted to identify variables supportive of inclusive programming for children with disabilities from the teacher's perspective. Structured interviews with 10 teachers at two pilot elementary schools in Indiana addressed issues concerning type and frequency of staff development, site visits to inclusive schools, previous experience with students having Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), previous experience in joint planning and teaching, experience planning social interaction interventions, experience with adaptations of the regular curriculum, and experience implementing teaching/learning strategies. Teachers in the two schools tended to see the more inclusive school as student-centered and the less inclusive school as placement-centered. Perceptions of the teachers at the two schools are quoted and compared concerning: instruction for students with IEPs, implementing inclusion in the classroom, the educational climate and school environment, planning and preparation, personnel roles and functions, and inclusion as a concept. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 381 979

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Teacher Perceptions:

Impacts of Planning for Inclusion

Marie F. Fritz and Maury Miller

Indiana State University

Annual Conference of the Council for Exceptional Children

Indianapolis, Indiana

April 6, 1995

EC303927

RUNNING HEAD: Perceptions

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Marie F. Fritz
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Inclusive education of students with special education was promoted in Indiana by House Enrolled Act 1396 of the 1992 Indiana General Assembly. This act provided funds for up to ten sites to become Special Education Inclusion Pilot Schools. A pilot school was defined as "[a] building in which all students residing in the school building attendance area attend the building and, further, students with disabilities are served, to the fullest extent possible, in general education classrooms. Special education services are provided in the general education classroom" (HEA 1396).

Following a year of either planning or implementation, during which time the schools were visited by researchers from Indiana State University, the schools and sites reported their progress. One of the pilot sites, a rural special education cooperative, had engaged in support activities and planning to become more inclusive at two schools. Yet after nearly a year of planning and implementation (1993-94) the two schools differed in their approach and their level of support and involvement with inclusive practices. The university faculty that had been involved with the cooperative during the planning stages examined teacher perceptions regarding the variables teachers determined to be most supportive of inclusive programming. Researchers asked, "What variables were the most supportive of inclusive programming from the teacher's perspective?"

Method

Structured interviews using a qualitative design was implemented. Topics included: staff development (type, frequency), site visits to inclusive schools, previous experience with IEP-students, previous experience in joint planning and teaching, experience planning social interaction interventions, experience with adaptations of the regular curriculum, and experience implementing teaching/learning strategies. Teachers were interviewed at their schools by two interviewers from Indiana State University. The interviews were taped recorded, transcribed and analyzed. The following headings represent the themes that emerged as a result of teacher perceptions at the two

schools. Although the schools differed in their approaches to inclusion, it became important to designate the two schools in non-pejorative ways. Consequently, the more inclusive school was dubbed the student-centered school (S-CIS) and the less inclusive school was dubbed the placement-centered school (P-CIS). These terms were derived more from the teacher perceptions than from an externally imposed concept.

Instruction for Students with IEPs

The perceptions of the teachers at the two schools differed in subtle ways. Teachers at the S-CIS named specific modifications they had made independently or with the assistance of the special education teacher. Modifications included reading tests to students, having fewer choices in spelling (selecting the correctly spelled word from choices), and having shorter essays. The S-CIS teachers discussed the practicality of learning some material and made decisions simply not to have the students perform some tasks. One S-CIS teacher told about 5th grade students selecting a state of their choice for research. The IEP-student selected Indiana because that was the state she would need to know about in the future as the other students had studied Indiana in the previous school year. Teachers talked about what the students needed to learn in a broad sense. One teacher remarked that a student in her class needed to learn to use her time well.

One of the S-CIS teachers expressed concern regarding the IEP contents by saying, "I wanted specifics. I didn't want to know that S. needs to compute numbers. Well, so what! So does every other fifth grader. I wanted to know what he did know in math. Had he ever been introduced to multiplication? Had he ever been introduced to division? How was it handled in the self-contained classroom? What could I do ensure a smooth transition?" It was these types of concerns that led to the term "student-centered" inclusive school.

Some of the teachers at the P-CIS made modifications and some did not. The types of modifications discussed by the P-CIS teachers were limited to providing peer tutoring, giving fewer choices on multiple-choice tests, furnishing taped lessons, and reviewing more frequently

during class time. The more frequent reviews were seen as beneficial for all the students. The IEP- students either participated in mixed groupings or were grouped together at the back of the classroom with an assistant. In this situation, the IEP-students were doing different things than the class and the classroom teacher wasn't sure what the students were learning. Two of the P-CIS teachers stated that they didn't expect too much of the IEP-students as a type of modification. Another indicated concern that IEP-students were no longer having the opportunity to learn specific skills with the special education teacher. This teacher expressed her impression of specific skill-building by saying that, "Obviously, someone who knows all the other **tricks** would be much better doing that." One teacher questioned whether the modifications were really useful. The special education teacher "goes through my tests that come with the series [that] are multiple choice and marked off two of the four answers to them. They take the basic test which I'm not sure if that is a very good solution either because most of the questions are pretty tough for them."

Operation in the Classroom

The day-to-day business of classroom operation were comparable between the two schools. Although the P-CIS students continued to have some resource/pullout time, the majority of the students' days were in general education classrooms. At both schools teachers mentioned instances of small group activities, lesson modifications, and special education personnel (teacher and assistants) working with individuals or small groups within the classroom setting.

Similarly, teachers at both sites described how time consuming it could be to have IEP-students in the classroom. Yet, additional assistance was provided to both IEP- and other students having difficulty by the special education personnel. Particular mention was also made of assistance provided by other students. Though there was little description of students being trained for specific peer mediation roles, teachers at both schools mentioned incidental assistance by others.

While classroom operation was a frequent theme evident in teachers' interviews, no major contrasts between schools were noted. Some subtle differences can be pointed out, though. At the P-CIS, teachers allowed individualization and student support to occur naturally. There was little mention of any attempts specifically to create these supports. IEP-students were "just there; at the back table with the special education teacher." At the S-CIS, although classroom operation might appear similar, in practice, teachers were reportedly more attentive to individual differences and designed specific activities to assist these students. Some of these activities were designed to include special education teachers and other students: "It's all of us together, and that's what it's really all about."

Climate/School Environment

While interviews with teachers at both schools brought forth the theme of general climate in the classroom and school, a distinction between the two schools was the apparent teachers' *awareness* of the general school environment. A teacher at P-CIS noted, "I really don't have a good idea of what [inclusion] is like [in other classrooms]." Classroom doors were closed, so that teachers "just really don't know too much about what's going on." Yet things must be proceeding acceptably as IEP-students were "always smiling. Everyone always seems happy." Other P-CIS teachers echoed the lack of awareness of what was occurring school-wide: "Don't really know; don't have much contact."

Another P-CIS teacher commented regarding the principal *not* being active in promoting inclusion. While the teacher did not see the principal hindering inclusion, she saw little evidence that he worked toward assuring that it did occur. In fact, teachers observed that other teachers who were opposed to inclusion were not assigned IEP-students--resulting in "overcrowding" of IEP-students in other classes. Furthermore, teachers related that differing opinions and questions among the teachers were simply not addressed. Another teacher commented that while it was not "politically correct" to speak against inclusion ("No one ever says, 'I don't want those children in

my classroom'."), inconsistency was observed in some teachers. That is, while a teacher might be observed to verbalize support for inclusion, opposition was actually noticeable. A teacher lamented that planning time among teachers was not scheduled.

Yet, positive comments were also heard at the P-CIS. Some teachers commented that inclusion could work when teachers had smaller numbers of IEP-students and sufficient assistance. Teachers found parents of both the IEP-students and other students to be supportive of the inclusive efforts. Generally, other classroom students were perceived as positive and helpful, even though they were seen as impatient with IEP-students at times.

Teachers at S-CIS noted that climate varied among schools in the corporation, and they did contrast the two schools. Teachers at S-CIS noted that their school was more ready to change--perhaps because of changes already undertaken as a part of state accreditation process. While teachers did not perceive a consistent school-wide approach to inclusion, they frequently mentioned the positive attitudes toward all children in their classrooms: "A feeling of trust. I try to transfer the learning process back to them." Cooperative learning groups and peer interactions were often mentioned. It was admitted, as at the P-CIS, that one probably did not really desire to learn more about dealing with IEP-students "until you are faced with them." However, it was felt that S-CIS teachers and principal were characterized by their flexibility and willingness to attempt different things: "There is a different environment in each building. This building is sort of like, 'Sure. I'll do it. We'll pilot it.'" Particular praise was given to the principal and special education coordinator for their support, frequent contact, and attention to implementation elements which required extra attention.

Planning and Preparation

The differences between the ways the teachers at the S-CIS and those at the P-CIS were remarkable. The same in-service seminars, conferences and visitations to Indiana inclusive

schools were available to all teachers in the corporation. A teacher at the P-CIS said, "We really didn't do that much to prepare for it (inclusion). We discussed it at a few faculty meetings. I pretty much went into it blind. And, I can't say that I have had anything last year that helped me that much other than having a speaker that showed a filmstrip that was really good, and just talking about it at some of our faculty meetings." Another teacher at this school stated, "I just went to some of the in-service things we had and listened. And that's about basically all I did." One teacher at this school lamented, "And I know on a couple of things people have said to me, 'We've needed more help,' or 'We've needed more preparation.' Well, quite frankly they needed to go (to the in-services)." Quite possibly this teacher had spoken with one who said, "I still feel, in all, that we could have had some more training and some more in-service over helping us to deal with understanding some of these problems that the children have. We have still, in some respects, sort of been thrown into it and we're going to wade through this and do the best we can."

These views of planning and preparation for inclusion can be contrasted with the views of the teachers at the S-CIS. One teacher expressed her view of the planning activities this way: "The first [speaker] that came in was really wonderful because he reaffirmed all of the things that I had already felt. It's that confirmation, all of us hearing this at the same time I think that's really important because then we can talk about things after we have the same common vocabulary. We have to talk about things." She extended this thought by saying, "I don't care how much we as a faculty sit around and discuss things--we don't have the answers. And so it's so necessary to go outside the school and oftentimes that's not what people want to do. They think you can sit around with the faculty and you can some how come up with the best judgement on these kids, and that's not true." A fifth grade teacher remarked, "I got to talk to some teachers who were special education teachers and I kind of saw how they were feeling. You know--they are giving up their whole classrooms! They're giving up their kids--which is hard to do! I would like to go back to

those very same schools now that I know what I know. Last year was just a changing of the mind set for me in so many ways. The conference [in Denver] was excellent!"

The teachers differed in how they used the opportunities for training. It would seem that teachers who believed that the change would take place whether or not they believed in it, took advantage of the training opportunities. Those teachers who doubted that the change would ever occur, did not. In both schools teachers were given the option of participating in the inclusion program. Only those teachers who were serving (or had served) IEP-students were interviewed. It is entirely possible teachers who did not wish to be involved in inclusion have a different perception of the value of the planning year activities.

Personnel Roles and Functions

The teachers in the two schools differed in how they utilized their personnel resources. Teachers at the P-CIS used the special education teacher and the assistants in the classroom for instruction. Often this instruction was described as taking place in the back of the classroom. There was no clear differentiation between the roles of the special education teacher and the assistant. These individuals "rotated" so that the special education teacher would be aware of what each IEP-student was learning. Meetings were arranged between the regular education and the special education teachers; however, the assistant was often the one who came into the classroom. One of the teachers said this was a cumbersome situation and indicated that she would like to meet with both of them at the same time to avoid the need to transfer of information. "I would like my meeting with the people that are going to be in my room working with those children. Right now our 7:45 a.m. meeting that was scheduled was only with the special education teacher, and I hardly ever see her. I would like to have a collaboration meeting with the assistant. She is going to be coming in my room every day. If all four of us [special education teacher, assistant, and grade level teachers] could get together...WOW! that would be great!"

Schedules for in-class assistance were built around need in specific subject areas. In one way or another four teachers said that the special education teacher was spread far too thinly. Yet, the general education teachers were responsible for coming up with adaptations. Consequently, it was not entirely clear what responsibilities the special education teacher had based on the perceptions of the teachers interviewed.

Teachers at the S-CIS experienced tremendous time pressures. They discussed this in terms of the amount of time available during the school day to grade papers and reflect on what had occurred in their classrooms. There simply was not time for this. Many of the teachers at the S-CIS made their own adaptations; yet they had regular weekly meetings with the special education teacher and one or more general education teachers. The special education teacher reported having a schedule for each inclusive classroom and finding it useful to pop in at random times. When the special education teacher or assistants were in the regular classroom their roles were not described differently from those of the P-CIS teachers. The primary difference seemed to be in their utilization of one another as resources for problem solving. "And so sometimes when we have a problem we look at each other and say, 'How are we going to solve this?' And, again, you have to almost have the problem before you understand how to fix it. We work really well together and we can bounce ideas off one another and say, "Now let's do this,' and try it. And we will, and if it fails we try something else. So that helps a lot."

The teachers at the S-CIS established weekly regular planning times and kept those time available for that purpose. The assistants were not included in the planning sessions. The special education teacher was responsible for training the assistants. The need for this was evident at the beginning of the school year when the changes first went into effect.

Although the differences between the two schools were subtle, each school approached inclusion differently. Teachers at the P-CIS did not report meeting with the special education teachers and described the role of the special education teacher as similar to that of the assistant.

These teachers reported their problems to the principal for resolution. Teachers at the S-CIS engaged in problem solving and told the principal what their needs were. Classroom assistance from special education personnel were acknowledged as helpful, as was the involvement of the principal: "He's right in the middle of it." Teachers at both schools expressed hope for improved working during the next school year.

Inclusion as a Concept

Inclusion was perceived as making a positive impact at both of the schools. Teachers at each school generated similar definitions of inclusion: "including all students in a normal classroom; trying to meet all their needs within one group." Yet, even when describing inclusion, attitudinal differences were present. At the P-CIS, simply having the child placed in the classroom, "*just* including them in the classroom," appeared to be sufficient as a definition. At S-CIS, on the other hand, having IEP-students in the classroom was considered part of a larger perspective on inclusion, "a part of society; what is best for each individual; like life." Additional elements which S-CIS teachers put into the inclusion definition were positive preparation for classmates and the additional help provided by special education personnel.

It was certainly true that the P-CIS teachers saw some advantages to moving toward inclusion: "It opened my eyes a little bit; makes other students feel more fortunate; *at least* [the IEP-student] is there and has contact with the other kids." In fact, one teacher verbalized that for the sake of socialization, inclusion was preferable. Nonetheless, that same teacher said that for academic purposes, the old (pullout) system was better. Teachers at P-CIS also commented on parents' positive reactions.

Yet P-CIS teachers continued to feel hesitant. One teacher commented on the essential need to have a good dedicated classroom teacher for inclusion classrooms. This teacher also commented that she felt she was "cheating other children." Though there was admission that children who had

been served in self-contained classrooms might not have gained academically, there was acknowledgement that IEP-students were learning some general knowledge in general classrooms: "365 1/4 days in a year--what's right--what's wrong (listing things the IEP-students were learning)." There was the feeling that this general knowledge was not sufficient learning; was somehow lacking in importance.

At the S-CIS, though, this kind of general knowledge was valued as one of the primary outcomes of inclusion; a parent's comment: "I never thought S. would learn about volcanoes." And a teacher's: "They actually learn just by listening to everything around."

The perspectives of the teachers at the S-CIS varied. One perspective was purely practical. A teacher volunteered that "these are kids you've always had in your room anyway." This perspective concedes that inclusion is an extension of mainstreaming. There was a clear acknowledgement of the high expectations that teachers needed to have for IEP-students. Another perspective was that of being part of a larger picture. "We're building citizens of the future; a part of society; they've got to work with other people." A third perspective noted a S-CIS was ownership of the inclusion program. A classroom teacher who has special education responsibilities for the child verbalized: "Who owns the kid? In this building, *we* do."

Discussion

Although inclusive practices were occurring at the two schools and the two schools had equal access to training opportunities, teachers differed in their utilization of resources and opportunities. The corporation coordinator discovered mid-way through the planning year that planning had to be site-based in order to move forward. The advantages to this approach were that the schools took ownership of the process and teachers felt empowered. The disadvantages were clear: Teachers who did not believe that change would occur, did not avail themselves of the resources. Although this research was limited to ten teachers in two schools and that the schools differed in many ways, it seems clear that one of the greatest variable of concern is teacher

perception. Another possibility that may have accounted for the differing approaches could have been the level of support from the principal. Teachers perceived this a powerful indicator of success; yet this aspect was not examined in this study.